

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 1901.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN CULTURE.

Greek Thinkers; a History of Ancient Philosophy. By Theodor Gomperz, Professor at the University of Vienna. Vol. i. Translated by Laurie Magnus, M.A. Pp. xv + 610. (London : John Murray, 1901.) Price 14s. net.

THE study of the history of Greek philosophy requires no defence and, fortunately, little encouragement. Confessedly our intellectual culture can be traced to Greek origin. The subject is so engrossing, and the full comprehension so indispensable, that able minds will be ever ready to consider the problem and give it fuller illustration. How far the questions that provoked discussion in the Greek colonies on the shores of the Mediterranean were intuitive, how far they were acquired, is of small importance in comparison with the manner in which they affect us. In these days, when the spirit of inquiry is active, we may doubt whether we tap the true source of originality by questioning Greek texts and obscure fragments. The spade of the archaeologist is proving itself an equally potent factor. The sand-hills and tombs of Egypt have been made to reveal the secrets they have kept so well. Explorations among the ruins of ancient Babylonian or Assyrian cities have unearthed the traces of a highly developed civilisation on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates which may have operated not less powerfully on the Greek colonists than the Greek philosophy has affected us. It may be that the student of the future, in his anxiety to trace the earliest effects on the human mind, will have to begin his criticism still farther back, but in the absence of any considerable literature we must at present be content to regard our culture as a Greek product.

Among those who have laboured diligently and with effect upon the many problems that exercised the ancient Greek, the researches of Prof. Gomperz will occupy a high place. His book entitled "Greek Thinkers," which appeared in 1896 and is now translated by Mr. Laurie Magnus, is an exceedingly welcome contribution to this subject. This work not only exhibits accuracy of scholarship and critical acumen, but is equally distinguished by lucidity of expression. Perhaps, too, we may say that Prof. Gomperz has been fortunate in his translator. It seems to us that Mr. Magnus has accomplished his part of the work with admirable skill, and that to an English reader the charm of the work is greatly increased by the ease and brightness with which the original thoughts of the German writer are expressed. Prof. Gomperz deserved a good translator. He has done much useful work himself in making his countrymen acquainted with the thoughts and philosophy of J. S. Mill through translations, and it is only fitting that a similar service should be rendered to his monograph.

The main object of Prof. Gomperz's work is, it may be assumed, to show how greatly, and in what particular directions, we are indebted to Greek thought and Greek methods. Of course, as a general principle the effect is

admitted, but to trace the connection with any degree of completeness is a matter of no small difficulty. It requires a survey as a whole of the developed intelligence of the Greek mind, an appreciation of the different tendencies of ancient thought, and a very complete knowledge of modern culture. The author thinks it not impossible that in the future we may see an exhaustive universal history of the mind of antiquity. Pending the appearance of such a monumental work, we welcome with gratitude the worthy contribution that is here made to the more general scheme to which it forms an adequate introduction.

In an introductory chapter the author unfolds, as a panorama, the theatre in which all future development was generated. He dwells appreciatively on the effect colonial life and experience exercised on the intelligence and vigour of the nation, fostering, on the one hand, the hardy and courageous disposition of the emigrant; and, on the other, enlarging his horizon and stimulating his ambition by travel and contact with foreign civilisation. It was in the colonies, doubtless from the introduction of the foreign element referred to above, that the greatest intellectual vigour was afterwards found. To them more than to the parent state it was given to steep themselves in intellectual pursuits, and with whom the riddles of the world and of human life were to find a permanent home and to provoke an enduring curiosity.

The author divides his book into three sections—The Beginnings, From Metaphysics to Positive Science, The Age of Enlightenment. Such a division must of necessity be a little arbitrary, suggesting greater breaches of continuity than really existed. Also, at times, it may lead to a little confusion in chronological arrangement, but that is of small importance, since progress never exhibits the uniform onward movement we connect with time. Historical or biographical references when introduced simply play a secondary part as a background, to give effect to the ordered development. As earliest in history, but perhaps more advanced in scientific accuracy, containing, as it did, the accumulated information of the priests of Chaldea and Egypt, the Ionian school comes first under review, and well exhibits the author's general method of treatment. He endeavours to find the principle underlying the original expression, to think as these old philosophers thought, to determine the amount of truth at which each arrived, to give him credit for it, and to compare and contrast it with modern views. In the Ionian school, for instance, we have hitherto, perhaps, too much considered the astronomical teaching, a result of the commanding importance which Thales has acquired, owing to the part the famous eclipse connected with his name has played in scientific chronology. This has introduced a disproportion which is fatal to a general survey. We have forgotten that he also taught that water was the primary element. To have the true measure of the time we have to remember him as a chemist as well as an astronomer. Prof. Gomperz finds in the teaching of this school, underlying the vagueness, two of the corner-stones of modern chemistry—the existence of elements and the indestructibility of matter. At another point the "physiologists" of Ionia actually outstripped the results of modern knowledge. The bold flight of their imagination never rested "till it reached

the conception of a single fundamental or primordial matter as the source of material diversity" (p. 46). Prof. Gomperz's comment is, "Here it may almost be said that inexperience was the mother of wisdom." We are inclined to agree with him, though possibly not quite in the sense in which the phrase is used. The scientific teaching of the school seems to have been best at its birth, and rapidly to have deteriorated. But while admitting and appreciating the author's wish to give credit to whatsoever things are true and of good report, difficulties and uncertainties must exist owing to the scarcity of original documents. We get the views of the great thinkers of antiquity filtered through the minds and coloured by the influence of a crowd of disciples, of collectors, of commentators. The author admits that the whole pre-Socratic philosophy is one vast field of ruins. The picture constructed from these scattered mosaic fragments may be very beautiful to look at, but it may not be the same picture that was originally drawn.

We should have liked to follow the author through each school in which he discovers the different tendencies of ancient thought or given some evidence of the discriminating appreciations that have accompanied some time-honoured name. One could linger long over the Eleatics, those pioneers of criticism who sought to rouse mankind from indolence of thought and the disposition to dogmatic slumber. For the paradoxes of Zeno we have always entertained a profound veneration, and the author is kind enough to stir these dry bones and make them live. Some of these he has clothed in a modern dress, but the difficulty does not lie in the dress, and the old problem connected with relative and absolute motion seems as elusive as ever. The tale of the arrow sped from the bow is put into this captious form : "Does an object move in the space in which it is, or in the space in which it is not?" And this seems as good a way as any to put the problem, which does not seem to have been clearly expressed in the original. Similarly with the old, old story of Achilles and the tortoise, to which we believed we could have given a satisfactory answer before reading the author's comments, but now entertain grave doubts. It is a difficult task to frame a paradox which cannot be exploded in less time than it takes to construct it, and the ingenuity of Zeno will be appreciated by those who have attempted to follow him on this thorny path.

The historians and the physicians or medical schools must also be passed over in silence, though it cannot be imagined that in a critical account of Herodotus, for example, there is not much to interest and perhaps something to qualify. The importance of the medical schools is insisted upon, since here exact observation supplied a much needed check to hasty generalisations, and many a forgotten name to whom accident has denied justice appears in this list of worthies, all contributing to build up science as we understand the term. A work of some 600 pages by a German author might be supposed by some to be a very dull work. This would certainly be an error. It is bright and lucid, free from pedantry, and occasionally epigrammatic. Prof. Gomperz promises us two more volumes ; we have no doubt but that the interest will be equally well sustained, and we hope he may again meet as pleasant and competent a translator.

NO. 1658, VOL. 64]

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL EXPERIENCES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR.

A Civilian War Hospital ; being an account of the work of the Portland Hospital, and of experience of wounds and sickness in South Africa, 1900, with a description of the equipment, cost and management of a civilian base hospital in time of war. By the Professional Staff. Pp. 343. (London : John Murray, 1901.)

THE Portland Hospital was a hospital organised and equipped by voluntary effort in this country for service in South Africa. It was the first of several similar hospitals sent out after the declaration of war in October 1899 ; but it was not the first voluntary hospital ever attached to a British Army at the front, as the authors suggest in their preface. One well-known hospital, for example, the hospital which is now the British Hospital at Port Said, was originally established as a voluntary hospital for the sick and wounded of the Egyptian Campaigns. The Portland Hospital, however, has the credit of being the first example in this country of a voluntary undertaking on behalf of the sick and wounded being placed entirely in the hands of the military medical authorities for organisation, equipment and management. Formerly the promoters of such undertakings preferred to act independently and, as a matter of fact, to run counter to official medical authority, believing that their usefulness would be in proportion to the extent to which they could over-ride the restrictions imposed by military discipline and control. Continental nations have long ago recognised the folly of this conception, and the Portland Hospital has the merit of having led the way in this country towards a loyal recognition of the necessity of voluntary aid in war becoming an integral part of the military medical organisation. The dedication of the volume to the Principal Medical Officer of the Field Force and to the Officers of the Military Hospital, to which the Portland Hospital was attached, indicates the success of this more modern conception of the value of voluntary aid in war.

The Portland Hospital may, indeed, be regarded as civilian only in name and in the fact that its professional staff consisted of Mr. Anthony Bowlby, Dr. Howard Tooth, Mr. Cuthbert Wallace and Mr. J. E. Calverley, and that the cost of its equipment and maintenance was defrayed from private sources. In other respects it was a distinctly military organisation under an Army medical officer, Surgeon-Major Kilkelly of the Grenadier Guards, and was, in fact, a fifth section of the military establishment known as a general hospital at the base.

The gentlemen named are the authors of this volume, and they have achieved their task admirably. The opening chapters and several voluminous appendices form about one-third of the book and describe the personnel, equipment and interior economy of the hospital. It can scarcely be said that they open up fresh ground or present new facts for consideration. The remaining chapters contain an excellent and valuable record of the medical and surgical work done in the wards of the hospital or in the wards of other hospitals to which the staff of the Portland Hospital had access.

The medical work is recorded in two chapters by Dr. Tooth and Mr. Calverley. The first and more important